

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

COMPLETE LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1-8 : (Canceled)

Claim 9 : (New) A communications system, comprising:

a) a plurality of interconnected network elements (NE), each NE comprising one or more ports, each port for inputting from an adjacent one of the plurality of NEs a synchronization signal and a quality level indication (QLI) for indicating a quality of a source of the synchronization signal;

b) each port for outputting to the adjacent NE a selected one of the input synchronization signals and the QLI;

c) each NE being associated with a unique NE identifier;

d) each port of each NE being associated with a source identifier (SID) for identifying the port at which each synchronization signal is input;

e) each port of each NE comprising QLI means for setting a value of the QLI output at that port based on a comparison of the SID of that port with the SID of the selected synchronization signal input port;

f) the SID of each port comprising the NE identifier of the adjacent NE;
and

g) a central management means comprising means for setting the SID of each port of each NE to the appropriate NE identifier value.

Claim 10 : (New) The system as claimed in claim 9, in which each NE comprises sending means for sending its own NE identifier to each NE to which it is directly connected.

Claim 11 : (New) The system as claimed in claim 10, in which the sending means is arranged to repeatedly send the NE identifier.

Claim 12 : (New) A method of indicating a quality level of synchronization signals in a communications system comprising a plurality of interconnected network elements (NE), each NE comprising one or more ports, each port for inputting from an adjacent one of the plurality of NEs a synchronization signal and a quality level indication (QLI) for indicating a quality of a source of the synchronization signal, each port for outputting to the adjacent NE a selected one of the input synchronization signals and the QLI, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) allocating to each NE a unique identifier and allocating to each port of an NE a source identifier (SID) for identifying the port at which each synchronization signal is input;
- b) receiving synchronization signals at the port or ports of each NE;
- c) associating each received synchronization signal with the SID of the port at which it is input;
- d) selecting for each NE one of the received synchronization signals for output from the port or ports of that NE;
- e) comparing the SID associated with the selected synchronization signal with the SID associated with each port at which that synchronization signal is output;

f) setting the QLI output at each port according to the result of the relevant comparison;

g) setting the SID of each port to the NE identifier of the NE to which that port is directly connected; and

h) operating a central management means to associate each port with the appropriate NE identifier value.

Claim 13 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 12, including the step of each NE sending its own NE identifier to each NE to which it is directly connected.

Claim 14 : (New) The method as claimed in claim 13, including the step of each NE repeatedly sending the NE identifier.